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The Level of Combat and Expenditure of Ammunition by Communist Forces  
in South Vietnam

The level of combat prevailing in South Vietnam has been estimated to be one in which each enemy battalion is engaged in combat on the average of one in thirty days. This estimate, prepared by DIA, is based on a reported 600 VC/NVA battalion sized actions that took place in the six month period September 1965-February 1966. During this same period the number of VC/NVA battalions averaged almost 100 per month, implying a level of combat in which each enemy battalion engaged in combat on the average of one in thirty days. It has been further estimated that each day a unit is in action it expends one-third of its basic load of ammunition, an expenditure based on a combat factor of that of an attack on a fortified position.

The purpose of this memorandum is to suggest that (1) the current level of combat in South Vietnam may be in the range of (1-15 to 1-20) days and (2) that each day a unit is in action it may be expending less than 1/3 of its basic load of ammunition.

1. Level of Combat

In order to establish any meaningful estimate on the level of combat prevailing in South Vietnam it has been necessary to make certain assumptions. These assumptions are dictated by the lack of sufficiently detailed information on the type and size of enemy forces encountered on the battlefield. Summaries of military operations appearing in NMCC operations reports, daily MAC-V intelligence summaries, and Annex F (Significant Victories and Defeats) of MAC-V Monthly Evaluations frequently note that the enemy force encountered on the battlefield is of unknown size. Even when information is available on the estimated strength of enemy forces within an area of operations, reports of contact with the enemy in terms of the intensity of combat are frequently lacking.

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The methodology used in this paper for estimating the current level of combat in South Vietnam is as follows. Weekly summaries of selected military statistics of Communist activity in South Vietnam were researched back thru 11 September 1965. These weekly summaries report the total number of battalion size or larger actions/attacks and small unit actions/attacks initiated by both friendly and enemy forces. These actions/attacks are broken down into total number of actions/attacks, and the number of these operations that established enemy contact. Only those actions/attacks in which enemy contact was established are included in this analysis. The total number of battalion initiated actions/attacks in which enemy contact was established were compiled on a monthly basis for the period 11 September 1965-23 July 1966. The overwhelming number of battalion size attacks/actions which took place during this period were initiated by friendly forces. If it is assumed that for each friendly battalion size initiated attack/action -- which establishes contact with the enemy -- an enemy force of comparable strength is engaged in combat, then, by dividing the total number of battalion sized or larger attacks/actions establishing enemy contact each month by the average number of enemy battalions operating within the same period, the average number of days per month an enemy battalion is in combat can be derived. Of course it is very unlikely that for every friendly initiated battalion size or larger attack/action establishing enemy contact, an enemy force of equal or comparable size is being met on the battlefield. Thus, the assumption that each enemy force is of battalion size is unquestionably overstating the level of combat. But there are two other factors, and possibly a third, which would tend to mitigate this bias. First, there are instances, where

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enemy forces, greater than battalion size are massed on the battlefield. A regimental attack would be represented in the statistical summary as a battalion size or larger encounter, but would not be weighted to distinguish it from a smaller sized attack, involving perhaps only one battalion. A reinforced North Vietnamese regular army division, such as that encountered in Operation Hastings would be represented as a single battalion size or larger operation when in fact it represented a series of battalion sized operations. Secondly, the level of combat does not reflect the number of small unit (less than three company) size attacks that have taken place. The number of these operations in which enemy contact has been established have averaged over 750 per month during the period September 1965 thru July 1966, and have been increasing on a monthly average since May of this year. Third, incidents of terror, sabotage, and harassment, are likewise not incorporated in the data used for estimating levels of combat. Although most of these incidents probably involve only <sup>a</sup>small number of <sup>and</sup>men/materiel the total number of these incidents would appear to be some bearing on the level of combat.

If it is assumed, then that for every friendly force battalion size or larger initiated attack, the enemy response is similar in terms of personnel committed to combat. An enemy battalion would be engaged 1.8 days per month on the average since last September, with a range of from 1.48 days to 2.27 days per month, and a mode of about 1.6 days per month.

Another indirect approach which may be useful in gauging the level of combat is an analysis of the total number of friendly force battalion days of operation. A battalion day of operations is counted when a force of at least 3 rifle company

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equivalents operates in the field for any part of a day in which the unit contacts the enemy or is exposed to enemy action. During the seven month period January 1966-July 1966 each friendly battalion has been operating in the field on the average of 13 days a month; a period in which the unit contacts the enemy or is exposed to enemy action. Although not in itself an index of the level of combat, the relatively high number of days per month in which friendly forces are exposed to or make contact with the enemy suggests that the level of combat of one in 15 to 1 in 20 days may not be unrealistic for enemy forces. An analysis of Annex F (Significant Victories and Defeats) of the most recently available MAC-V monthly evaluation reports for April and May would tend to support the estimate of an escalation in the level of combat. During April and May there were a minimum of 182 & 179 enemy battalion days of operation respectively. Enemy strength during the same two month period averaged 120 and 124 battalions. Thus an enemy battalion was engaged in combat on the average 1.52 days in April and 1.44 days in May, or what amounts to about 1 in 20 days in each month.

## 2. Ammunition Expenditure

The estimated ammunition expended by enemy forces has been based on a combat factor of an attack on a fortified position. The ammunition expenditure, using such a factor, and based on the weapons found in a standard type VC infantry battalion would be 2.69 short tons per day, roughly equivalent to 1/3 of the basic load of ammunition 7.9 short tons. Instead of using an offensive combat factor, it would seem more appropriate, in the absence of detailed field reporting on enemy ammunition expenditure, to use a defensive combat factor, since the overwhelming

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number of actions/attacks taking place in recent months have been initiated by friendly forces. Recent Free World forces' ground, air, and sea operations have spoiled the enemy's offensive preparations, overrun base areas, destroyed support facilities, and inflicted heavy casualties. Although the Communists retain a significant offensive capability, friendly units have seized the initiative in many regions and the enemy has been unable to mount a major military campaign. The pattern of enemy attack in 1965 showed a steady decline in the small scale variety and an increase in those of battalion size or larger. This trend has been reversed in 1966 to the point that there were no battalion size initiated attacks in July, although those on a smaller scale have been rising since May.

Substituting a defensive combat factor, for the offensive factor heretofore used, would lower the estimated ammunition expenditure to 28% of the basic load, or 2.21 short tons, each time a unit of battalion size equipped with the new family of Chicom weapons is engaged in combat. The methodology used in making this estimate is contained in Table I of the Appendix. The combat factors used in the table have been taken from FM 101-10.

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Table 1  
Estimated Expenditure of Ammunition  
(Ammunition Per Weapon Per Day, Expressed in Rounds)

<u>Weapons</u>	<u>No. Weapons</u>	<u>Weight/Round</u>	<u>Rounds/Weapon*</u>	<u>Pounds/Day/Weapon</u>	<u>Pounds/Day/All Weapons</u>
Rifle	102	.6 oz.	15	.56	57.12
Carbine	313	.6 Oz.	4	.15	46.95
LMG	34	.6 oz.	100	3.75	127.50
MG 12.7	20	4.50 Oz.	30	8.44	168.80
FR 57**	10	12 lbs.	10	120.00	1,200.00
RL 40 mm.	5	4 lbs.	2	8.00	40.00
60 mm. mortar	11	3 lbs.	40	120.00	1,320.00
81 mm. mortar	5	7.3 lbs.	40	292.00	1,460.00
<u>Total</u>					4,420.37
(Rounded)					4,420.00 or 2.21 tons

\* Combat factor is meeting engagement.

\*\* Estimated.